Cyprus, the most eastern island of the Mediterranean became synonymous with copper in Late Antiquity: the Latin word *Cuprum* derives from *Aes Cyprium*, Cypriot copper, the term Pliny used in his book *Natural History* (*HN* XXXIV.2–4) to describe the pure metal rather than one of its alloys (Rickard, 1930, p.285). This is because Cyprus was one of the main sources for metal for the Old World since the Second millennium BC. This is of course a result of the island’s geology and mineral wealth.

The island is naturally divided into four geological terranes: (a) the Kerynia Terrane which largely consists of the Pendaktylos mountain range and runs roughly parallel to the north coast (b) the Mamonia Complex to the south west (c) the circum Troodos sedimentary sequence which encompasses the Mesaoria Plain and (d) the Troodos Ophiolite which covers more than a third of the whole island and rises to a height of 1,951 m (Edwards, et al., 2010, pp.15-16). As the largest and highest land mass, the Troodos is responsible for the island’s weather conditions and rain fall (Constantinou, 1982, p.13). In Antiquity, it was equally important for its forests. They provided fuel for the domestic hearths, the pottery kilns and the copper smelting furnaces, but also provided timber for ship building. Most significantly, the Troodos mountain range includes all of the economically-significant mineral deposits (Constantinou, 1992a, p.332). The Troodos’ mineral wealth was well known in ancient times as indicated in a passage from Pseudo-Aristotle (Aristotle *Frag.* Ph. 266) who states that: “... it was found on the island of Cyprus that there was a mountain larger and higher than all others, which was called Troodos …It has various mines of gold and silver, and copper, and stypteria, split and white, and true stypteria. And sory and yeast of gold, and misy and khalkitis and other metals”.

The geology of Troodos is consistent with ophiolite complexes, which are believed to represent fragments of the ocean floor (Constantinou, 2012, p.5). The mountain range was formed through sea-floor spreading and was lifted to its present position due to tectonic movements. Massive copper sulphide deposits, mainly composed of pyrite and chalcopyrite, are located in its periphery in the geological formation known as the pillow lavas (Constantinou, 2012, p.5) (Fig. 1). Because of these deposits Cyprus is considered even today Cyprus, the most eastern island of the Mediterranean became synonymous with copper in Late Antiquity: the Latin word *Cuprum* derives from *Aes Cyprium*, Cypriot copper, the term Pliny used in his book *Natural History* (*HN* XXXIV.2–4) to describe the pure metal rather than one of its alloys (Rickard, 1930, p.285). This is because Cyprus was one of the main sources for metal for the Old World since the Second millennium BC. This is of course a result of the island’s geology and mineral wealth.

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to be one of the five richest countries in copper per surface area in the world (Constantinou, 2007, p.343). Because of the uplifting of the ore deposits and their exposure to the elements, they were soon oxidized to form a gossan or “iron hat” which varies in thickness from several and up to 40 metres (Constantinou, 2012, p.5). The sulphide deposits are often covered by umbers, which have a rich brown colour, and ochres, which have an intense yellow or red colour. These are also significant economic minerals, which were extensively exploited in antiquity as well as in modern times (Constantinou, 1992a, pp.364-365). They were used as pigments for wall paintings and in pottery production from early prehistory until today (especially in the production of Bichrome wares (Aloupi, et al., 2000, p.23)). Other minerals such as chalcanthite, the copper sulphate, were used for the preparation of medicaments and were also systematically collected (Michaelides, 1996, p.144).

The exploitation of the rich Cypriot copper ore deposits lasted for almost three millennia. Recent archaeological evidence clearly shows that the ancient copper industry came to an end sometime around the 8th century AD (Kassianidou, 2011a, p.543). The mines were abandoned for more than a thousand years and it is not until the beginning of the 20th century that prospectors from the US and Europe became interested in Cypriot copper ore deposits after reading the ancient texts (Rickard, 1930, pp.287-288). The mining industry soon became one of the main sources of income for the island as it had been during the Bronze Age. According to Constantinou (1992a, p.339) since the mines opened in the earlier part of the twentieth century and for a period of forty years, 50% of the island’s exports were products of the mining industry. In the same period 15-25% of all the taxes collected and 50-70% of income tax derived from the mining industry (Panayiotou, 1989, p.38).

In modern times the copper ore was initially extracted with underground mining. It soon became clear that almost all the deposits had already been exploited in Antiquity: modern galleries invariably came across the ancient workings (Bruce, 1948, p.11). We are fortunate that J.L. Bruce, the resident director of Cyprus Mines Corporation, the company which from 1916 until 1974 had the lease for some of Cyprus’ richest ore deposits including Mavrovouni and Skouriotissa, wrote and published in 1937 a paper entitled “Antiquities in the Mines of Cyprus”. His publication remains until this day the most comprehensive study of ancient Cypriot mines. In his 1937 publication as well as in the one of 1948 Bruce offers invaluable glimpses of the ancient mining landscapes. He men-

...
ing the Chalcolithic period, that the Cypriots began to produce metallic artefacts made of native copper. The earliest artefacts date to the mid fourth millennium BC, they are very few in number, and consist of a very limited repertoire which includes chisels, pins and ornaments such as spiral beads (Peltenburg, 2011, p.3). The Cypriot chalcolithic artefacts are products of a rather simple and primitive technology (Kassianidou, 2013, p.232). In this period another material, picrolite, plays an important role, as it is used to produce pendants and small figurines which are believed to have had a symbolic character (Peltenburg, 1991, pp.111-115). The picrolite source is near the top of the Troodos mountains but it is carried down to the coast by two rivers – the Kouris and the Karyotis (Xenophontos, 1991, p.137). It is thus believed that most of the picrolite used to produce the chalcolithic objects could and would have been collected from the beds of these two rivers. Recent excavations, however, at the settlement of Souskiou Laona have shown that some of the picrolite was actually procured at the source (Peltenburg, 2012a, p.48). This is important as it shows that prehistoric people were exploring the Troodos ophiolite in order to collect valuable rocks and minerals. Things change drastically in the middle of the third millennium BC when Cyprus enters the Bronze Age. These changes are evident in all aspects of the material culture, economy and even mortuary practices (Webb and Frankel, 1999, p.4). Some of the most significant developments are detected in metallurgy. The Early Bronze Age is characterised by a marked increase in metallic objects, which now include weapons as well as a wider variety of tools, and which are deposited as grave goods in significant numbers (Kassianidou, 2013, pp.238-240). This increase in the availability of copper is the result of the development of extractive metallurgy. In other words during the Bronze Age copper begins to be extracted from cupriferous ores, through the process of smelting. In Cyprus the ores are sulphidic and therefore a complicated smelting process is necessary to extract the metal. It is only after this method was mastered, sometime after the beginning of the second millennium BC that Cyprus begins to produce and export significant amounts of copper and eventually takes over as the main source for this metal for all of the Eastern Mediterranean (Kassianidou, 2008, p. 256).

Unfortunately, we know nothing about copper mining and very little about copper production in the Early Bronze Age (Kassianidou, 2012a, p.126). This should not come as a surprise if we consider that the mountains and hills where Bronze Age mines and smelting workshops would have been located have now been completely removed by the modern open cast mines. The only direct evidence for Bronze Age copper mining was found in the mine of Ambelikou in 1942 (Dikaios, 1946; Merrillles, 1984; Webb and Frankel, 2013). Ambelikou is located in the north-western foothills of the Troodos and in the richest mining district of Cyprus which includes Mavrovouni, Apliki and Skourriotissa (Fig. 3). In the forties three galleries were opened up to exploit the copper deposit and in all three of them the miners collected ancient pottery and stone tools (Merrillles, 1984, p.6-8). These includ-
small quantities of mineral samples, pieces of slag and crucibles were collected (Gale, et al., 1996, p.130). The most abundant evidence for Middle Bronze Age copper smelting, including metal-lurgical ceramics, moulds and slag was revealed at Pyrgos Mavroraki (Belgiorno, et al., 2012). More recently evidence for small scale metallurgical activities were uncovered at the site of Politiko – Troullia (Falconer and Fall, 2013, p.108).

Written sources from sites in Syria dating from the 19th to the 17th centuries BC suggest that Cyprus, which is called Alashiya in the texts of its neighbours, exports some of the copper produced on the island to the East (Knapp, 2011, p.250). It is however, in the second half of the second millennium BC which corresponds to the Late Bronze Age, that the production and export of copper truly grew, reaching a peak in the thirteenth century BC. This marked increase in production (and subsequently export), is due to significant technological developments in the smelting installations: the furnaces were equipped with a system of bellows and tuyères, the use of which led to a significant increase in the operating temperature and thus to the melting of their contents which could easily and efficiently be separated without a significant loss of metal in the slag (Kassianidou, 2011b, p.45).

The innovations in the smelting technology can clearly be seen in the excavated remains of the only Late Bronze Age primary smelting workshop known to us until today. The workshop is located at the site of Phorades near the village of Politiko (Knapp and Kassianidou, 2008). The excavation directed by Bernard Knapp and the author uncovered 3 tons of primary smelting slag (Knapp and Kassianidou, 2008, p.335), small quantities of mineral samples, pieces of slag and crucibles were collected (Gale, et al., 1996, p.130). The most abundant evidence for Middle Bronze Age copper smelting, including metal-lurgical ceramics, moulds and slag was revealed at Pyrgos Mavroraki (Belgiorno, et al., 2012). More recently evidence for small scale metallurgical activities were uncovered at the site of Politiko – Troullia (Falconer and Fall, 2013, p.108).

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The use of bellows at Phorades is indirectly revealed: in the inner surface of some tuyère fragments one can often detect droplets of slag which have been sucked in (Kassianidou, 2011b, p.44). A small number of ceramic shards and a series of radiocarbon dates indicate that the workshop was active around the 16th-15th centuries BC, in other words at the very beginning of the Late Bronze Age.

The workshop is hidden in the north-central foothills of the Troodos and was not a part of a settlement. The limited numbers of ceramic fragments, food residues (faunal and floral) and any artefacts that were not in any way related to the smelting activities were or still were of use (such as stone tools) indicate that this was a seasonal site which was abandoned once it fulfilled its purpose. The ore that was smelted at Phorades was most probably collected from the nearby hill Kokkinorotsos. It is located about 500 metres to the northwest and it is clearly visible from the site because of the brightly coloured gossan after which it is named: Kokkinorotsos means red rock. On Kokkinorotsos there are several inclined adits but their date is unknown as they have not been systematically investigated. Although the possibility that they are modern exploration adits cannot be ruled out, the fact that they are spatially associated with slag heaps which date to the first half of the 1st millennium BC and with Phorades, can be used as indirect evidence for their antiquity (Knapp, 2003, pp.136-138). Since Kokkinorotsos was not exploited by the opencast method it provides us with a glimpse of what a prehistoric mining landscape would have looked like. Pine trees are still covering the gentle hills which would have been much more wooded in Antiquity. According to the study of charcoal samples collected at Phorades, Pinus Brutia was almost exclusively used as fuel for the smelting furnaces (Knapp and Kassianidou, 2008, p.142). Why they chose to place the smelting workshop at a small distance from the ore deposit is not clear but it may have to do with the need to be near a water source: the workshop is on the bank of a small creek and a spring. They would have provided water for the workmen and clay for the furnaces and tuyères. The scale of production at Phorades is small which means that several such workshops would have operated simultaneously around the foothills of the Troodos mountains. The discovery of “Phorades-type” slag in a number of different locations in the mining districts of Mitsero but also Xyliatos shows that this must have been the case indeed (Kassianidou, 2012b, p.101). Nevertheless, the impact of these workshops on the landscape would not have been significant.

The matte produced at Phorades would have to be converted into copper metal. This second stage in the process does not seem to have taken place in the same workshop and this may explain the presence of significant metallurgical workshops within the most important urban centre of this earliest phase of the Late Bronze Age, namely Enkomi which is located on the east coast of the island. Enkomi is the most cosmopolitan port town on the island throughout the Late Bronze Age. Some scholars suggest that it is very probable that at least for the first half of the Late Bronze Age it was the capital of Cyprus and the seat of the king of Alashiya (e.g. Peltenburg, 1996, p.35; Muhly, 1989, p.303).

Excavations in the north part of the city uncovered a very large building the earliest occupation which is contemporary to the Phorades workshop (Crewe, 2007, p.75). From its foundation and throughout most of its history this building was dedicated to metallurgical activities (Kassianidou, 2012b). Although it may seem irrational today that matte or black copper would have been carried from the ore bearing and forested regions of the Troodos foothills all the way to Enkomi which is located on the East coast of the island (for example Phorades is about 60km West - as the crow flies - of Enkomi), it is not impossible. Dikaios (1969, p.10), who was trying to understand the presence of extensive metallurgical workshops in Enkomi wrote in his introductory chapter: "Catling suggests that Enkomi drew its supplies of copper ore from the industrial site of Troulli, ten miles north of Larnaca, rather than from the distant Troodos hills. This may be so but the second alternative may be equally possible. In support of this I may quote the following instance: Until about fifty years ago (since Dikaios' book was published in 1969 this would correspond to the 1920s), before the introduction to Cyprus of mechanical production of ice, villagers from the village of Prodromos which lies below the Troodos summit, used to carry to Nicosia, during the summer season, ice, on donkey back, from pits on the highest summit of Troodos, in which snow accumulated during the winter and where it was carefully preserved until the summer. According to information given to me by old inhabitants of Prodromos, they loaded the donkeys at sunset and travelled all the way down to the plain along short cuts across hill country, reaching Nicosia on the following morning. If then ice could be carried from the summit of Troodos to Nicosia in one night, surely copper ore could be transported to Enkomi from the Skouriotissa and other mines which lie on the northern foothills of Troodos, during the same
length of time or somewhat longer. There were, probably organized convoys of donkeys or mules carrying regularly ore to industrial towns such as Enkomi and others”. It is very likely that in these workshops at Enkomi the final stages of the copper production would have taken place including the casting of the metal in the form of oxhide ingots. Recently published Lead Isotope Analysis data indicate that already from the fifteenth century BC Cypriot copper was cast into the shape of oxhide ingots and exported to Crete (Stos-Gale, 2011, p.223).

During the following centuries the scale of production and export intensified significantly as indicated by the discovery of the Uluburun shipwreck which among other things was carrying the staggering amount of 10 tons of copper in the form of oxhide and bun ingots (Pulak, 2008; Pulak, 2005). According to LIA analysis the most likely source for the metal of both the oxhide and the bun ingots is Cyprus (Stos, 2009, pp.172-173). The cargo is similar in scale to shipments of copper mentioned in the letters from the king of Alashiya which were found in the well-known archive of Tel el Amarna (Moran, 1992, pp.104-113). Indeed the fact that among those who correspond with the pharaoh, the king of Alashiya is the only one who sends copper, has often been used as an argument to support the identification of Alashiya with Cyprus (Knapp, 1996, p.8; Muhly, 1996, p.49). In the letter EA35 the king of Alashiya apologizes for sending only 500 unspecified units, (but most probably they are talents (Moran, 1992, p.150)) of copper explaining that this is because the god Nergal has “slain all the men in my country, and there is not a (single) copper-worker” (Moran, 1992, p.107). This shows that the copper was locally produced and sent directly from Alashiya to Egypt. According to Moran (1992, p.108) it is not clear whether by copper-worker the king is referring to a miner or to a copper refiner. Unfortunately, no copper mines or primary smelting workshops dating to the 14th century BC are known to date. The Enkomi workshops, however, were still as active as ever (Dikaios, 1971, p.505).

Things are very different in the thirteenth century BC which corresponds to the Late Cypriot IIC. This is the period that has produced the majority of the evidence for copper production on the island. It is in this period that the sole mining settlement, the famous Apliki Karamallos, is dated (Du Plat Taylor, 1952; Kling and Muhly, 2007). The mine of Apliki is well known because, according to Lead Isotope Analysis, it is most probably the mine that generated the copper used to produce the vast majority of copper oxhide ingots found in Cyprus and abroad (Gale, 2011, p.218). The Apliki mine lies within Cyprus’ richest mining district, defined in the publications of Gale and Stos-Gale as the Solea axis deposits, which include the mines of Mavrovouni and Skouriotissa (Stos-Gale et al., 1997). In modern times the three mines produced more than 85% of the total copper ore concentrate that was exported from Cyprus (Constantinou, 1982, p.15). Furthermore, based on the size of the slag heaps it is estimated that during the antiquity this area probably produced more than 50% of the total amount of copper produced on the island (Constantinou, 2007, p.339). The average copper content in these three ore deposits varies from 2 - 4.5 % but in the secondary enrichment zone which is the one that would have been exploited by the ancients it reached as much as 20% (Constantinou, 2007, p.342). The ore deposits were not only rich in copper they were also easy to mine. According to Constantinou (2007, p.341): “The human energy necessary for the mining of one ton of conglomeratic ore from these three orebodies (he means Apliki, Mavrovouni and Skouriotissa) of this area is orders of magnitude less than that required for the mining of the same amounts of massive sulphide ore from Ergani Maden (Turkey), Ermiotis (Greece). Jabel Said (Saudi Arabia), Rio Tinto (Spain) or the copper ores from Timna and Feinam.” Skouriotissa is the only copper mine still operating today and a modern plant is now producing very pure metallic copper on the island for the first time since Antiquity. Mavrovouni lies in the Turkish occupied area since the 1974 Turkish military invasion of the island and Apliki lies in the UN buffer zone and is thus only accessible with a special permit from the United Nations Task Force in Cyprus. Fig 4 is a photograph taken from the top of the Skouriotissa open cast mine which shows the spatial relationship between the three mines. The location of Apliki and Mavrovouni is marked by the enormous modern spoil heaps and the scar left by the Mavrovouni opencast. The landscape is rather bare today, because most of the forest burned down during the 1974 invasion. It would have been wooded and lush in Antiquity, as it was in the more recent past. This is because of the abundance of water – even today the Karyiotis river which passes through this area is one of the few on the island that does not run dry in the summer. Apliki is less than eight kilometres away from the coast where in modern times the Cyprus Mines Corporation set up a pier to ship the copper concentrates from these three mines out.

The site of Apliki Karamallos was discovered in 1938 when modern mining operations uncovered the remains of buildings. It was partly excavated in 1938 and 1939 by Joan Du Plat Taylor and was subsequently destroyed (Kling and Muhly, 2007, xi). The rescue exca-
essential commodities were of more immediate import than those with more distant coastal centers”.

Apliki was not the only copper ore deposit to be exploited in this period. Lead Isotope Analysis shows that several bronze artefacts from a number of Late Cypriot IIC sites are consistent with other Cypriot ore deposits (Gale and Stos-Gale, 2012, p.71). Unfortunately no Late Bronze Age mines or primary smelting sites have yet been discovered in any of the other mining regions for the reasons outlined in the beginning of this paper. The vibrant Cypriot copper industry of the 13th century is clearly illustrated by the abundance of archaeometallurgical finds such as slag, tuyères and crucible fragments that have been recovered in other, contemporary Late Cypriot IIC settlements, such as Kalavasos Ayios Dhimitrios (South, 2012) and Alassa Pano Mandilaris (Hadjisavvas, 2011). Both are in close proximity to important copper ore deposits and presumably both would have been involved in the exploitation of these deposits. The most extensive workshops, however, have been found in Area III of Enkomi, where a new building is erected in this period (Dikaios, 1969, p.46). The western sector of the building constituted a group of copper workshops, organized around a central court, where according to Dikaios (1969, p.56) an unprecedented intensification of metallurgical activity was evident.

Fig. 4: View from the open cast of Skouriotissa which can be seen in the foreground. In the distance are the mines of Apliki and Mavrovouni.
Unfortunately very little is known regarding the organization of the copper industry in this period because the political organization of the island remains unclear (for a recent review of the evidence see Knapp (2008, pp.131-172)). Namely, it is not known whether in the thirteenth century BC the island is still a single political entity governed by a single king, (based in Enkomi?) or whether it has already started to break up into smaller regional polities which eventually developed to the Iron Age kingdoms. In the first case the copper extracted from the mine of Apliki would have to be transported overland, on a donkey caravan, like the one described by Dikaios, to Enkomi, where it was cast into oxhide ingots and then exported. In the latter case the oxhide ingots could have been produced at Apliki and exported from a yet unknown harbour town that would have been located on the coast below. This may have been the predecessor of the kingdom of Soloi, one of Cyprus’ most important and wealthiest Iron Age kingdoms.

At the end of the thirteenth century BC many of the settlements such as Kalavasos Ayios Dhimitrios and Alassa are abandoned (Karageorghis, 2012, p.73). Enkomi, however, even in the twelfth century, was an important harbour town and still active in copper production and presumably export. Although the workshops in Area III were abandoned, many others were established in other sectors of the town (Courtois, 1982, pp.160-162). Copper was still being cast in the form of oxhide ingots and according to the Lead Isotope Analysis the metal source was still the mine of Apliki, although the settlement of Apiliki Karamallos had also been abandoned by this time (Manning and Kuniholm, 2007, p.328). In the 11th century the Late Bronze Age comes to an end but not the production and trade of Cypriot copper which continues to thrive during the Iron Age (Kassianidou, 2012c, pp.231-237).

Conclusion

From the earliest phase of human occupation on Cyprus the island’s mineral wealth was systematically exploited. The extent of the human impact on the natural environment can only be indirectly identified by compiling archaeological evidence regarding the intensity of copper production. For example the size of the Uluburun copper cargo, which is estimated to be 10 tons, clearly shows that already by the 14th century BC the ore deposits were intensively and systematically exploited. The copper industry would have played a significant role in the transformation of the natural landscape to an industrial landscape which would have been characterized by the gradual depletion of the forests and the presence of small scale smelting workshops scattered around the mining regions of the islands. Cyprus’ political topography would also gradually change because of the copper industry, as new settlements, for the miners and smiths were established in areas which were not extensively inhabited in the past. Today very little survives of these prehistoric mining landscapes which were gradually obliterated first by the industrial scale copper industry of the Roman period and then with the shift to open cast mining in the twentieth century. It is always the hope that remnants, such as the copper smelting workshop of Phorades, have escaped and are waiting to be systematically recorded and excavated.

References


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